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## Is love ever enough?: teaching Shakespeare at the secondary level

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**Is love ever enough?:  
teaching Shakespeare at the secondary level**

by

**Kendra Dodson Breitsprecher**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

Program of Study Committee:  
Donna Niday, Major Professor  
Kathy Hickok  
Amy Slagell  
Linda Shenk

Iowa State University

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....	4
Chapter 3: Methodology and Findings .....	27
Chapter 4: Analysis .....	47
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	56
Bibliography .....	61
Appendix A.....	66
Appendix B.....	67

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### **Abstract**

This project addresses the teaching of the works of William Shakespeare in Iowa's secondary schools. The research questions addressed are as follows:

- Is Shakespeare still relevant in the twenty-first century secondary classroom?
- Are Iowa 7-12 teachers following national and international research in regards to the teaching of Shakespeare in their classrooms?
- How can teachers modify Shakespearean instruction to fit the needs of modern classrooms, focusing on the concept of differentiated instruction?

Nine current and recently retired Iowa secondary English teachers were interviewed as part of the study. It was concluded that Iowa teachers with mid-level experience (ten-nineteen years) were the most successful at including Shakespeare in their 7-12 curriculum and using the concepts of differentiated instruction when planning and executing their Shakespeare lessons.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Why should we teach Shakespeare? Let me count the ways . . . . What are the compelling, universal reasons that the son of a Stratford glove-maker is a core part of our English curriculum these 400 plus years later?

When I began teaching high school over twenty years ago, I included Shakespeare's works liberally in my curriculum. The reason was simple: I loved him. I have always felt that if teachers truly love a work or an artist, they are generally successful at passing this appreciation on to their students.

In addition to my fondness for the Bard, his work was also easily accessible. Each of my textbooks that first year of teaching contained at least one of his plays and several of his sonnets, and there was no need to go to the principal and ask for a new classroom set.

Shakespeare was also uncontroversial, at least in the eyes of most parents. Only the most fanatical might question the appropriateness of teaching a Shakespearean play at the high school level. When I began teaching in the 1980s, many people questioned works taught in the public school. In my first few years of teaching, I saw parental challenges to a library book that mentioned brandy, received late night phone calls over my decision to teach *Dracula* to eleventh graders, and had a colleague who was confronted after church services by a mother who didn't like his optional reading list. I saw no reason when I started teaching Shakespeare to point out that *Hamlet* deals with incest or that *Macbeth* has images of the occult. In fact, I learned right away (at the ninth and tenth grade levels at least) that if the teacher didn't point out the ribald humor and the mature themes, the students generally wouldn't pick up on it themselves. Take the first scene of *Romeo and Juliet* for instance:

two servants are in a public market place, making adolescent comments about thrusting maids against a wall and having a pretty piece of flesh. In my two decades of teaching, I never had a student “get” the inappropriateness of their comments—or at least not mention it in class. For these reasons, Shakespeare was a “safe” choice of literature for a first-year teacher.

Shakespeare was also a widely used unit for high school English classes. If “everyone was doing it,” it had to be the right thing to do. Every time I ordered the films for my *Romeo and Juliet* unit, I felt a certain degree of comfort knowing that (as I told my ninth graders year after year when they questioned “*why* we were studying this *stuff*”), “Almost ninety percent of all freshman English classes in America are gearing up to study *Romeo and Juliet*. It’s like an unwritten law.”

I began teaching Shakespeare to my high school classes out of love, convention, convenience, and fear. I continued teaching it for two decades primarily because it was so much fun—for my students and for me. I changed my methods and my materials from time to time, but teaching “Bill” to my classes was a staple of my curriculum. We even celebrated his birthday each year on April 23 with cake and a sonnet reading.

My four reasons for choosing to teach Shakespeare were, obviously, not backed by empirical data. After concluding my high school teaching career, I decided to examine, in much more depth, *why* (or even *if*) Shakespeare should be taught in secondary classrooms today and *how* this should be done. Perhaps I had been wrong all these years in exposing my students to my favorite playwright. Once I started examining this question, more and more related questions rose to the surface. Is Shakespeare still relevant in the new millennium? With all the wonderful and varied young adult literature available, why teach these archaic

plays? In the multi-modal, multi-ethnic, multi-ability schools of today, is the Bard too old-fashioned and one-dimensional to reach the students? Does Shakespeare present a view of the world that is out-of-date with today's modern culture? Will teaching something as difficult as Elizabethan iambic pentameter turn our students off from reading entirely? How can we expect a Jamaican immigrant, say, or a gang banger from the Bronx to appreciate the beauty of language demonstrated by William Shakespeare? How can a migrant worker whose parents work at a meat processing plant and have limited English skills even begin to tackle something as complex as iambic pentameter?

Let's face it: the classroom of today is quite different from the classroom of the 1950s. In fact, it is very different from the high school classroom in which I studied in the early 1980s. Even in relatively insulated Iowa, today's typical secondary classroom includes students from diverse cultures and English Language Learners, talented and gifted students and students with special needs, highly motivated students and students with physical handicaps, students who learn from hands-on projects and students who are visual learners.

My research examines the reasons why Shakespeare is still relevant in the twenty-first century secondary classroom and then presents various methods for integrating the works of William Shakespeare with modern educational theories. In addition to providing a literature review, I also take a more pragmatic approach and interview local 7-12 grade English teachers about their current relationship with the Bard in their classrooms. The result is a portrait of how Shakespeare is taught in secondary Iowa classrooms. This paper then asks the question: How can teachers modify Shakespeare instruction to fit the needs of a modern Iowa classroom?



## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The last thirty plus years have seen a strident call from school administrators, businesses, and parents for teachers to change their instruction to fit the needs of a modern classroom. Perhaps this call started when American parents were told their schools were no longer the best in the world. Perhaps it began with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Perhaps it was George W. Bush's emphasis on standardized testing in the No Child Left Behind legislation. No matter when it started, Americans now tend to agree that school reform is necessary in the United States, and emphasis has been placed on how information is presented and outcomes are assessed in the classroom. One of the most popular educational theories at this time is differentiated instruction. This method calls for teachers to take into account different learning styles (as proposed by Carol Ann Tomlinson), readiness levels, multiple intelligences (as proposed by Howard Gardner), and other barriers to learning when planning lessons, instruction, and assessments in order to raise comprehension levels and test scores.

It is no coincidence that curriculum has come under close scrutiny in the past thirty years as well. Those concerned with education have not only been reconsidering *how* teachers instruct, but also *what* they instruct. The balance between preparing students for important standardized tests and the much-maligned "teaching to the test" certainly brings up the question: Exactly what material should be taught in the modern English classroom? Is teaching the classics in today's public schools a good use of time and resources or would students be better served with a more practical English education?

Even William Shakespeare's work—which had reached an almost God-like place in the English canon—has not escaped this examination. Perhaps instead of reading time-

honored plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, students should be using some new technology to hone the skills necessary to do well on the ITEDS and ACTs? Perhaps instead of acting out scenes from *Hamlet*, today's youth need to be studying works with a larger world view, to fit into the multicultural communities in which we all live? Or, perhaps in this ever-more wired world, most English instruction should focus on technical reading and writing? In examining these questions I will first focus on the rationale in Great Britain and the United States for teaching Shakespeare and then follow with an analysis of instructional strategies for teaching Shakespeare, including differentiated instruction.

### **Research and Rationale in Great Britain**

In response to increasing questions being raised about the suitability of Shakespeare in today's classrooms, Shakespeare scholars and garden-variety English teachers alike rushed to defend keeping the works of William Shakespeare and other classics in the curriculum. However, they needed evidence to back up their assertion. In order to prove to critics that Shakespeare does indeed have a place in the secondary classroom of the new millennium, the challenge seems to be combining the public's cry for more accountability from schools with the universal need for a well-rounded education, which includes the classics. Therefore, middle school and high school English teachers need to justify teaching Williams Shakespeare by presenting concrete ways this instruction will benefit the diverse learners in their classrooms.

It seems natural that the home of the Bard—England—would be the leader in the study of Shakespeare in the classroom. In 1992, it became compulsory for students in Great Britain to be taught at least one Shakespeare play in Key Stages 3 and 4 (the equivalent to middle school and high school in the United States). Also in 1992, the Royal Society for the

encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) began a comprehensive study regarding arts in education. A sub-committee of this group specifically looked at the teaching of William Shakespeare. This work became popularly known as the Shakespeare Project. At the end of the study in 1994, Maurice Gilmour published their findings, concentrating particularly on Shakespeare at the secondary level. He began his report by explaining why Shakespeare was such a large focus of this committee. According to Gilmour, “Shakespeare holds a high position in English and world literature. His output was prodigious, his plays having relevance to all and written in language that is rich in imagery and dramatic power, moving fluently from heroic verse and lyricism to the broad humor of the street” (5). Gilmour showed the parallels between Great Britain—which has a national curriculum requiring the teaching of Shakespeare—and the United States, stating:

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the situation in the UK and that in the USA, where Shakespeare is an important aspect of the curriculum for older students, both as literature and as performance material. As in the UK, there is a tendency in American schools to restrict access to students with more academic ability although there are schools where Shakespeare is taught to all students (6).

Gilmour examined how the teaching of Shakespeare can be adapted to benefit the modern student. In order to study this, he took part in staging a production of *Macbeth* at Moat Community College in Leicester. Most of the students involved were Afro-Caribbean, although other cultures were represented as well. He introduced this project by answering the question “Why a Shakespeare play?”

For a start, his plays have strong story lines, interesting characters and themes that are relevant to any human situation at any time. Also, anyone who can master the

language and understand the themes within a Shakespeare play must grow in confidence and self-esteem. His plays also lend themselves to adaptations that take into account the knowledge, skills and experience of a group (89).

These students did adapt by composing and producing a much-reduced script that set the play within the Masai society of central Africa. The production incorporated tribal dance and music, but left in much of the “funny talk” (as one actor called it) of Elizabethan English. Gilmour wrote, “We did not pretend that we had done the whole play, or spoken the language with artistry, but we had approached *Macbeth* in a way that gave the group an excellent introduction to Shakespeare and dispelled the grey image they had of him.” (95).

In addition to Gilmour and his researchers, other British scholars in the early 1990’s also sought to examine and justify the teaching of Shakespeare in public schools. In *Shakespeare in the Changing Curriculum*, a collection of essays published in England that examined different aspects of teaching Shakespeare, John Salway looked at racial disturbances in the plays (108-124), Elaine Hobby examined queer readings of the texts (125-142) and Val Richards modeled a psychoanalytical approach (162-188). Other researchers contributed as well, examining many different ways modern readers can approach classic works.

In examining racial issues, Salway naturally concentrated on the play *Othello*, the single Shakespearean play with an African main character. He pointed out that earlier critics often ignored the racial issues in the play, writing: “Coleridge’s now common-place remark about Iago’s action as ‘the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity’ ignores the fact that now stares us in the face: Iago is patently driven by a deep racist antipathy” (109). Salway does not feel that a non-racial interpretation does the play justice.

Using his theory that race is central to the play *Othello* and shouldn't be ignored, Salway presented a Theatre-in-Education programme to thirty-four late adolescents. As part of the workshop, they specifically looked at racial epithets and references, especially those in Act I before the main conflict of the play emerges. "My objective was to make the racist implications fully visible and audible," he said (111). Although anticipating heated discussion, Salway did not predict some of the reactions this type of instruction produced with teenage students. In addition to giggling at the "old black ram is tugging his white ewe" line (which seldom happens in professional productions presented to adults), "One of them had suggested in a small group 'discussion' I overheard earlier in the lesson that Othello ought to return to the rainforest" (112). This type of racist comment is seldom heard or discussed when older people examine *Othello*.

Salway concluded that modern reading of *Othello* complete with racial implications is not only appropriate, but also stimulating to teenage audiences and perhaps might lead to necessary discussions about race in general. He admitted that discussions with readers this age and with this focus may produce somewhat unpredictable remarks, but concluded this is one way to keep Shakespeare relevant and interesting to many different groups of readers.

While Salway examined the issue of race and Shakespeare, Elaine Hobby examined the GLBT issues, particularly the queering of *As You Like It*. She began with a brief history of the treatment of homosexual education in England during the past decade (late 1980's-early 1990's) by the Tory government. She cited several examples of teachers who were reprimanded or even fired because of references to homosexual culture. She then incorporated society's view of homosexuality with the teaching of Shakespeare.

The leap from there to the teaching of Shakespeare is not a straightforward one, not least because thinking about the works of the Bard might seem an odd place to mount an attack on the uses of the idea of “family” by present-day government . . . . I will explore the way in which the centrality of the family can be explored, and in part challenged, when teaching a text that apparently resides quite comfortably within the core curriculum and notions of Shakespeare’s “greatness.” (129)

Hobby decided to take a safe topic—Shakespeare—and used it to introduce what some would view as unsafe or unsavory ideas.

She first offered the play to her students as one centrally concerned with problems of order and disorder. She then moved the discussion to the character of Rosalind and the juxtaposition of her as a typical young woman to her behavior when she dons the role of Ganymede. This led her to a discussion of gender roles in society, which included description of the patriarchal family structure in Elizabethan England and comparison to the societal structure of today.

Hobby then reassured her readers—who are possibly more conservative than she - that one doesn’t have to be a radical feminist or gay activist to approach these topics in the secondary classroom, stating: “It isn’t necessary for a play to present these issues in an entirely liberal or progressive fashion to enable classroom discussion of the questions of gender roles and social structure, of course. The very fact of this closing down of options can in itself be a stimulating point of analysis” (137). She presented a plea for educators to rethink the Tories’ “reform” in regards to sexuality issues in the classroom. “Through our practices as teachers, I believe, we can combat these attempts to police our lives and the lives

of those we teach. Such an opposition can even be made when teaching Shakespeare” (140). Hobby viewed Shakespeare as a conduit to discussing larger social issues.

Unlike Hobby and Gilmour, who focused on Shakespearean themes and how they are relevant for today’s readers, Val Richards concentrated on Shakespeare’s language as he examined the psychoanalytical approach to teaching his plays. He used the play *King Lear* to illustrate some ways this criticism can be used in the secondary English classroom. His students explored Freud’s mythological interpretations of the play, accepting some (Cordelia as the disguised goddess of Fate and Death) and rejecting others (like the Oedipal interpretation where Cordelia is guilty of loving her father Lear). He introduced students to the use of words like “breast” and “mouth” in the play and then explained a psychoanalytical interpretation of these words. His theory combined the study of psychology with the study of Shakespeare. Although he concentrated on the works of Sigmund Freud, he also brought in more modern psychoanalysis to keep the discussion current and relevant.

### **Research and Rationale in the United States**

On this side of the Atlantic, the National Council of Teachers of English in 1992 commissioned a similar study and published a similar work: *Shakespeare among Schoolchildren*. Mary Ann Rygiel specifically looks at the teaching of Shakespeare in contemporary American classrooms in this book, including teaching new immigrants. In 2001, Alex Fellowes continued examining the issue of non-native English speakers with his book *Bilingual Shakespeare*.

From the beginning of her book, Rygiel firmly placed her research and findings in today’s secondary classrooms. In her introduction, she agreed with Salway that teaching secondary students these works is quite different than other audiences.

We secondary teachers need historical materials to help us place Shakespeare in his Renaissance context; we also need practical classroom follow-ups. Our student populations are more heterogeneous and less advanced on Piaget's formal reasoning scale than the college and university populations taught by the usual writers on Shakespeare. Sometimes the information that a scholar relegates to a footnote might actually be more interesting to a young student of Shakespeare than a dry, abstract, and more seemingly relevant concept. (1)

In her comparison of college audiences with high school audiences, she stated, "If our students are more restless than older students, they are also often more honest (sometimes painfully so), sincere, openly affectionate, and more eager to learn and experiment than older populations" (2). The attention span in a high school classroom may be shorter than that in a college one, but the students' responses may be more genuine.

To illustrate her point, Rygiel used examples from a text often seen in high school classrooms: *Romeo and Juliet*. She stated, "Students will not always find greatness in the same places the teacher does, and they will laugh harder at the writer's slips (the discovery of Juliet's apparently cold body on the morning of her wedding to County Paris by Nurse and parents—all falling in deep "Oh!"s) and stylistic features (lots of lines of talk before dropping dead on stage)" (3). More experienced readers, such as those found in college classrooms, may temper their first reactions to scripts. Although they may want to giggle like their younger counterparts, they may stifle this reaction as "beneath them" or "childish."

After establishing that teaching Shakespeare to schoolchildren is different than teaching Shakespeare to older audiences, Rygiel looked at particular sub-groups in the contemporary American classroom. She described what she called the new immigrants,



students from the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Philippines who speak Spanish as their first language and Asians from Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, where the language is very different from English. She set up three assumptions: (1) drama is meant to be acted with bodies; (2) students who know no English can still enjoy a dramatic performance of Shakespeare; and (3) minority readers' reactions to the canonical literature may not be the same as the teacher's rhapsodic appreciation or rather fixed, unchallenged view of the text's meaning. She emphasized that non-native readers' reactions may make a traditional teacher uncomfortable. Assumptions number one and three could be applied to any students, not just English Language Learners, as already shown by the some of the earlier researchers in England, including Salway with his student's "return to the rainforest" comment.

Rygiel concluded that the teaching of Shakespeare is valuable and necessary for all children, including "new immigrants," stating, "To acquaint all students with Shakespeare is to acquaint them with an important English writer. Not to do so is part of an insidious pattern of regarding some students as being forever culturally and linguistically outsiders" (105). She offered the "practical classroom follow-up" she said teachers need. Some of these methods will be discussed later.

Much of the review of literature examines and evaluates the standards and benchmarks in regard to Shakespeare instruction. In 1998, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association jointly published a list of twelve standards for English/language arts instructions. Four of these standards, in particular, apply to the teaching of Shakespeare. These are Standards 1, 2, 3, and 10. Standard 1 deals specifically with text selection and reads:

Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. (par. 3)

This standard not only offers justification for teaching the classics, but also encourages teaches to experiment with non-traditional forms of literature, like Manga or dual-text versions.

Standard 2 addresses the range of literature that should be taught to students. It reads: “Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g. philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience” (par. 4). The plays of William Shakespeare represent the Renaissance period and the drama genre. Standard two can be used as justification for teaching these works.

Standard 3 describes educational strategies. It reads:

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g. sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics). (par. 5)

Standard 3 complements the theory of differentiated instruction in regards to teaching all literature, including the works of William Shakespeare.

The final NCTE/IRA standard that relates directly to teaching William Shakespeare’s works is Standard 10, which provides strategies to assist non-native speakers of English.

Standard 10 reads: “Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop a competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum” (par. 12). This standard relates directly to the work of Alex Fellowes, another researcher who examined the teaching of Shakespeare to English Language Learners and non-native students with his book *Bilingual Shakespeare: A Practical Approach for Teachers*. Fellowes went beyond Rygiel’s assumption that students can enjoy and appreciate Shakespeare even if they can’t read and/or decipher a word of it, and he provided a rationale for adopting the bilingual approach to teaching the Bard, as well as practical teaching methods to do so. Much like Gilmour’s production of *Macbeth* that featured African music and dancing, Fellowes said “reinventing his plays keeps Shakespeare alive” (3).

Fellowes found that teaching Shakespeare’s plays in a cross-cultural manner was not only effective, but exciting for student and teacher alike. Fellowes stated, “What I have found particularly exciting is the way that a cross-cultural approach to Shakespeare’s works not only enables bilingual pupils to understand them better at their own level of personal experience but provides them also with the scope for blending eastern and western traditions” (4). He then showed the similarities between the Indian epic *Ramayana* with *As You Like It*; a Panjabi story with *King Lear*; and *Cymbeline* with a story from the Asian subcontinent, “Magnun and Laila.” Using this method, Shakespeare is not only an important English writer, as Rygiel stated, but an important writer of many different cultures, making him all the more relevant in today’s multicultural classroom.

Fellowes concluded with a firm call for teaching the works of William Shakespeare to all schoolchildren, regardless of their background. With this statement, he confronted the issue of Shakespeare's relevancy, stating:

It was once suggested to me that my work on Shakespeare was a waste of time.

“What’s the point doing Shakespeare with these children? How can his plays be relevant to any children living in the 1990’s, let alone those coming from a completely different culture?” The assertion was that Shakespeare’s plays described a totally different world and had nothing to do with the 20th century: “They’ll only confuse these kids!” This view was dismally patronizing and revealed low expectations of bilingual pupils. The main grounds on which such criticism of studying Shakespeare in school was based—its “otherness” and seeming “irrelevance”—are precisely the reasons for studying Shakespeare, particularly with bilingual pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds (96).

Fellowes illustrated that Shakespeare is not only relevant, but also interesting, educational, and fascinating for all students, including bilingual ones. He also clearly showed that the themes in these plays are universal and can serve as a bridge between cultures.

### **Differentiated Instruction and William Shakespeare**

While Shakespeare scholars were looking at particular ways to justify the teaching of Shakespeare to today’s students, other educational scholars were taking a broader look at making all subjects more accessible for all learners. This research naturally trickles down to teacher training. One of the most popular in-service topics of the past decade has been the theory of differentiated instruction, pioneered by Carol Ann Tomlinson, the author of more than 200 books, articles, book chapters, and other professional development material that

focuses on education. Her 1999 book *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of all Learners* brought the term “differentiated learning” into the vocabulary of public schoolteachers. She stressed that “students can take different roads to the same destination” in education (*Mapping*, par. 1). According to Tomlinson,

Teachers find it increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of learners who populate their classrooms. Culture, race, language, economics, gender, experience, motivation to achieve, disability, advanced ability, personal interests, learning preferences, and presence or absence of an adult support system are just some of the factors that students bring to school with them in almost stunning variety (*Integrating* 1).

Differentiation, according to Tomlinson, is “student-aware teaching. It is guided by the premise that schools should maximize student potential, not simply bring students to an externally established norm on a test” (*Goals*, par. 3). Therefore, differentiated instruction involves adapting lesson plans, instruction, and assessment to accommodate different learning styles, different levels of learning readiness, and different learning backgrounds, as well as interest levels of the students. The differentiated classroom looks quite different than the stereotypical “stand and deliver” classroom found in schools of previous generations. The image of the teacher lecturing every class period while the students takes notes is not one seen in a classroom that practices differentiation. Differentiated classrooms are often louder, more active, and more outwardly chaotic than the classrooms of old. Tomlinson wrote:

In a differentiated classroom, teachers begin where students are, not the front of a curriculum guide. They accept and build upon the premise that learners differ in important ways. Thus, they also accept and act on the premise that teachers must be

ready to engage students in instruction through different learning modalities, by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity (*Differentiated Classroom 2*).

Many Shakespeare teachers were ready to “jump on the bandwagon” and begin offering practical ways to incorporate the newest educational theory with the teaching of their favorite playwright and were eager to be given ways to justify teaching classic literature in the modern classroom with its modern problems. Since most English teachers by nature aren’t the “stand and deliver” type of instructor, they had already been differentiating their instruction. Now they were looking for the pedagogy and the language to back up their methods. Tomlinson’s theory became popular at a good time for these teachers. Just as calls for more accountability were increasing, “differentiation” became the new buzzword at staff meetings and educational conferences. Today, the education section of the bookstore offers many options for those interested in using the concept of differentiated instruction in their classroom. Shakespearean classes are no exception.

In *Teaching Romeo and Juliet: A Differentiated Approach*, the authors ask, “What’s different about differentiation? Why differentiate the Bard’s plays?” (1). They then go on to offer philosophical reasons for differentiation in the teaching of Shakespeare, as well as more practical methods for doing this, such as lesson plans and specific classroom activities. They state:

The good news is, you (teachers) probably already employ strategies that fit perfectly within the tall order that differentiation sometimes appears to be, strategies such as multiple-intelligence activities, Paideia discussion, project-

based learning, complex-instruction group work, and backwards planning for enduring understanding and essential questions. (ix)

No matter how intriguing the differentiation theory is to many teachers of Shakespeare, the questions remains: How much should we change the classics, including the works of William Shakespeare? Adapting to different learning styles is all well and good, but should today's teachers dare to change the text of the Bard, like Gilmour did with his production of *Macbeth*? Should they offer bilingual or Manga text to their students, or is it imperative that the classics be read in their original, intended format? Obviously, plays are meant to be acted, but how far should this go? Is it necessary to keep to the strict, traditional interpretation when staging Shakespeare's plays or is it permissible to set *Hamlet* in the jazz age, say, or portray the apothecary as a cross-dressing crack-addicted prostitute, as one Iowa State University production of *Romeo and Juliet* chose to do?

Most dedicated teachers of Shakespeare recognize that the insistence of Shakespearean "purists" that the Bard should be taught only in its original form is detrimental to the argument that Shakespeare is still relevant for today's schools. These teachers realize that the image of Shakespeare as "highbrow" must and can be fought in many different ways and that the battle begins in their classroom—and their assumptions are backed by research. Maurice Gilmour said that the teaching of William Shakespeare was a way to "break out of what might be called a cultural ghetto" (89) and combated the image of the Bard as a "highbrow" form of literature and therefore somehow inappropriate for some students.

While many teachers view the use of differentiated instruction in the teaching of Shakespeare as a perfect fit, some educators continue to argue against a traditional liberal arts

education. These people say that “learning for learning’s sake” does not help raise standardized tests scores and also does not benefit students in the “real world.” These people argue it is more important for students to know how to read technical materials (“How to program a DVD player”) and learn “life skills” than to study Hamlet’s insanity or Lady Macbeth’s ambition. Lovers of the classics have been searching for justification to continue teaching what they love in the age of “make it or break it” tests. Differentiated learning may be “just the ticket” for those teachers—and may also help less enthusiastic literature teachers embrace Shakespeare as a way to reach their district’s educational goals, while still exposing students to the universality of fine writing.

In examining possible changes to instructional methods, some educators have looked at the text itself. One method of differentiating learning is to offer different textbooks to different students. Some examples of this are abridged editions, film, modern language, synopsis of the text, audiotapes, graphic novels or Manga, and bilingual or split-page versions (where the Shakespearean language is printed on one side of the book and the modern translation is on the other). Some purists insist that the only way to teach Shakespeare is with the original iambic pentameter, and this may certainly be one method (or even perhaps the primary method) of instruction for Shakespearean units. However, struggling readers will also have to be given alternatives to reading obsolete English if they are going to have any chance at success. English Language Learners, for instance, cannot reasonably be expected to fully comprehend Shakespeare tragedies when they are struggling with modern-day English. Perhaps a bilingual text or manga version of *Macbeth* would be a good way to help them reach the educational goals for the unit. Students with special needs



might also benefit from a graphic novel version of the play or might be more comfortable with a synopsis of the plot.

DeCourcy, Fairchild, and Follet, the authors of 2007's *Teaching Romeo and Juliet: A Differentiated Approach*, acknowledge the concern that Shakespeare should be taught in its original format, but offer a rationale to look at alternative versions as well. "In an ideal world, each student we teach would read every word of a Shakespeare play and savor it. While we pause to sigh that this is not our reality, we might resuscitate our spirits with a solution: that less is more. If we can guarantee that our students savor some words well, then we can worry less about whether they are reading them all" (DeCourcy, Fairchild, Follet 7). The authors recommended several different alternative versions of Shakespeare's plays for educators to try in their classrooms.

For instance, for novice students they recommend the Sparks Note edition of *Romeo and Juliet* from the No Fear Shakespeare series. In this edition, the right-hand side supplies the traditional text and the left-hand side has a line-by-line translation. Advanced students who need less help understanding Elizabethan English can use a dictionary and a Shakespeare glossary. By using this method of different texts for different learners, all students can reach the goal of reading and understanding *Romeo and Juliet*—just through slightly different methods.

A similar method can be used with English Language Learners, although their side-by-side text would have a translation in their native language on one side and the original text on the other. Struggling readers and non-readers might be best served with a graphic novel version, like the Manga version of *Romeo and Juliet* published by Amulet Books ((2007). Once again, purists might object to the much-truncated plot and dialect, as well as the

portrayal of the star-crossed lovers as fashionable chic Asians in body stockings. However, most secondary English teachers would agree that if a Manga version is the only way a student can understand even the rudiments of Shakespeare, it is a valid curricular concept.

Instructional strategies are another way teachers can differentiate in their classrooms. Obviously, the use of drama and/or staging when teaching Shakespeare's plays is not only appropriate, but also helpful for more visual learners. Audio learners benefit from hearing the play read to them, while oral learners benefit from reading the play aloud themselves. Some visual learners might benefit most from making posters and/or visual representations of the Capulets' and Montagues' feud, while others might learn best by comparing several film versions of the same story.

In the book *Teaching A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, and Macbeth*, which is from the Shakespeare Set Free series recommended by the Folger Shakespeare Library website, Peggy O'Brien stresses that the study of Shakespeare should actively involve the use of drama:

It's about doing. Students get his language in their mouths, take on the work of actors and directors, get to know a play from the inside out. Don't worry about that stodgy academic notion that the body and the intellect can't be engaged simultaneously, that students moving around a classroom can't possibly be really learning anything. Make no mistake: learning Shakespeare through doing Shakespeare involves the very best kind of close reading, the most exacting sort of literary analysis. (xii)

O'Brien not only strongly encourages – some might even say demands – the use of drama in all classrooms that teach Shakespeare, but also directly confronts critics, calling them “stodgy.” Diverse dramatic activities such as staging scenes, designing costumes and

tableaus, acting and directing, evaluating performances, and even charades are all discussed in the Shakespeare Set Free series and are all vital ways to incorporate drama into the classroom study of Shakespeare.

Film is yet another way to bring drama into the classroom, albeit a quite different form of drama than student-produced scenes advocated by O'Brien. Once again, the Folger Shakespeare Library offers commentary on this teaching technique in an essay by Michael T. Collins entitled "Using Films to Teach Shakespeare." Collins discusses how he combined the theories of O'Brien – that students need to be "doing" Shakespeare themselves - with his appreciation for and use of film. He stated, "To enable students to experience for themselves the openness of the plays to interpretation by actors and directors, I ordinarily begin my Shakespeare course with a short workshop that integrates films of the plays with practical exercises"(par. 1). Collins describes a popular method of bringing film into a literature classroom: using movie adaptations in conjunction with reading the script. He then broadens this approach and encourages using non-Shakespearean films when teaching the Bard. For example, he has shown scenes from the movie *Fatal Attraction* when teaching *King Lear* and has assigned students to watch Richard Nixon's resignation speech while studying *Othello*. This method not only brings in film, but other genres such as non-fiction and oration.

A recent trend has been making modern film adaptations of Shakespeare aimed at teen audiences. Examples of this are *Ten Things I Hate about You*, *She's the Man*, and *O*. Much of the current research regarding the teaching of Shakespeare centers around movies such as these. Michael D. Friedman divides this type of film into three groups: versions, adaptations, and citations, with versions being readily identifiable as Shakespearean plays

and using much of the Shakespearean language (*Romeo + Juliet*) and citations being where Shakespeare is simply referenced in the movie (*Clueless*). Adaptation occupies the middle ground, borrowing “basic plotline, characters, and thematic issues from a particular play, but employs the contemporary vernacular almost exclusively in its dialogue” (par. 5). Many of the most prominent Shakespearean movies aimed at teen audiences of the past decade fall into this category including *Ten Things* and *O*.

Film versions of Shakespeare are one of the most popular instructional tools available, as most secondary school English teachers believe that using film in the teaching of Shakespeare is valuable. According to Sarah Martindale, “86% of the 138 teachers who completed the (my research) questionnaire (on film in the classroom) think that film adaptations of Shakespeare can definitely play a useful role in teaching his works. The figure rises to 98.5% if those who think that film adaptations of Shakespeare can play some role in teaching his works are included.” (par. 3). It is obvious by the sheer amount of research and discussion in educational communities that film plays an active part in the Shakespearean classroom.

Differentiated instruction is not an either/or proposition. *All* of these methods can be used in a standard classroom to benefit the learning of *all* students—and without a great amount of extra work for the teacher. According to Rick Wormeli,

In differentiated classes, grading focuses on clear and consistent evidence of mastery, not on the medium through which the student demonstrates that mastery. For example, we give students five different choices for showing what they know about the rise of democracy: writing a report, designing a Web site, building a library display, transcribing a “live” interview with a

historical figure, or creating a series of podcasts simulating a discussion between John Locke and Thomas Jefferson about where governments get their authority. We can grade all the projects using a common scoring rubric that contains the universal standards for which we're holding students accountable (par. 18).

Wormeli showed many ways that the same outcomes can be reached by different students with different abilities using different methods.

In *Teaching Romeo and Juliet*, DeCourcy, Fairchild, and Follet echo the research of Howard Gardner and present their readers with literally hundreds of methods to try with different types of learners. For example, a lesson entitled “Present the Prologue” begins with the instruction: “Use your preferred learning style to introduce your class to the meaning and tone (feeling or mood) of Shakespeare’s prologue” (26). The authors provide different projects for each of the four learning styles: (visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, and verbal-linguistic). The groups are instructed to work together and then report their findings back to the class at large. Once again, the same outcome is reached through different avenues, benefiting all learners—the goal of differentiated instruction.

In “The Goals of Differentiation,” Tomlinson points out what she calls the “dual goal” of differentiated instruction: “Few students will become dedicated learners because their standardized test scores increase. Differentiation, fully understood, is concerned with developing not only content mastery, but also student efficacy and ownership of learning” (par. 28). For the 7-12 English teacher, differentiation is not only a way to reach all learners in the classroom, but a method to justify teaching classic texts to concerned administrators, parents, and school board members. Teachers can confidently avow that if a student can

understand Shakespeare, he or she can tackle anything—including filling in those circles with a number two pencil. They can securely state that earning how to execute a close reading of classic works will certainly help students when they have to do similar close readings on the ITEDs. They can prove with research-based evidence that being able to translate and rephrase Elizabethan English into modern vernacular feeds directly into the vocabulary sections of standardized tests where utilizing context clues is a necessary skill for success.

### **Overall Rationale for Teaching Shakespeare at the Secondary Level**

Beginning with the research of Maurice Gilmour in Great Britain in the early 1990's, the conclusions drawn have been quite consistent from researcher to researcher in regard to the relevancy and benefits of teaching Shakespeare to secondary students. These conclusions can be summarized into twelve main points:

- The works of William Shakespeare are still relevant to today's students, due to their universal theme and spectacular use of language.
- All students benefit from the study of the works of William Shakespeare.
- All students should be taught the works of William Shakespeare, regardless of background, learning style, or ability level.
- Reading Shakespeare gives students confidence when tackling other subjects/authors.
- The works of William Shakespeare can be read and enjoyed in many different forms and although some forms may not be as true to the original nature of the work as others, students can still benefit even from truncated versions.
- The works of William Shakespeare lend themselves easily to modern adaptations and interpretations.

- The works and themes of William Shakespeare can be used to introduce students to important current topics such as race, homosexuality, and mental illness.
- The works of William Shakespeare can be used to help bridge cultures.
- The plays of William Shakespeare are meant to be performed and viewed, not simply read and discussed.
- Adolescent audiences may interpret Shakespeare differently and respond differently than adult audiences.
- The works of William Shakespeare easily mesh with the concept of differentiated instruction.
- Reading the works of William Shakespeare can help raise standardized test scores, particularly those in the vocabulary sections.

The research seems clear and abundant: the works of William Shakespeare are still relevant and valuable in today's 7-12 classroom, although students may react quite differently than their more seasoned and heterogeneous adult counterparts. Through the process of differentiated instruction, these works can be made accessible to all learners. Also, the skills used and honed in studying Shakespeare will directly benefit the students when they take high-stakes tests.

However, the question remains: Are Iowa educators following the research and actively differentiating their Shakespeare instruction? Are they teaching Shakespeare in their classrooms at all? Has the continued emphasis on standardized tests made any difference in how Iowa's secondary teachers approach the Bard? And, if so, what are these teachers doing differently than before make-it-or-break-it tests?

### Chapter Three: Methodology and Findings

In order to get an overview of current teaching practices of Iowa middle school and secondary school teachers in regard to William Shakespeare, I chose to do a qualitative study and interviewed nine current and recently retired Iowa English teachers (Appendix A). A qualitative study examines the "how" and "why" of a particular topic through methods such as interviews, journals, observations, or document analysis. Non-numerical data is obtained from a relatively small group of respondents and is analyzed for its patterns. According to Bogdan Biklen in his book *Qualitative Research for Education*, qualitative research has characteristics of and is often referred by the name of three other types of research: field research, naturalistic research, and ethnographic research. Field research means studying the topic in the field rather than in a researcher-controlled site such as a laboratory, naturalistic research requires the researcher to go to the site of the event, and ethnographic refers to describing a culture. According to Biklen, educational research is often qualitative since it takes places in the classroom where teachers are engaged in the natural behavior of instructing and describes the educational culture of the moment (3).

My study contains all of these elements since I used interviews of teachers conducted in classrooms in which teachers described the context of their own school environment, as well as the culture of state mandates with the Iowa Core Curriculum and federal mandates of No Child Left Behind. I chose a specific type of qualitative study: the narrative inquiry, which has been described as "research through storytelling" (*Narrative*, par. 1). This type of research can "reveal qualities of group experience in a way that other forms of research cannot and help determine questions and types of follow-up research" (*Advantages*, par. 2). It was my assumption as I began the interviews that



secondary English teachers were natural storytellers and that I would receive much more detailed, interesting, and relevant information from one-on-one interviews than I would from mailing a less-personal questionnaire to a larger sample of teachers.

The teachers I interviewed were given a set of pre-interview questions (Appendix B). I divided the teachers into three groups: three newer teachers with less than ten years experience, three teachers with 10-20 years of experience, and three teachers with more than 20 years of experience. Each of the interviews was audio recorded and then a partial transcript was taken of each interview, concentrating on relevant quotes. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and took place at a variety of locales ranging from the teacher's classroom to local restaurants.

After completing the nine interviews and transcribing the relevant information, I began to look for strands and themes in the interviews. While organizing and compiling this data, I conducted several follow-up interviews with the teachers using e-mail.

Six of the nine teachers interviewed taught at predominantly rural schools. One taught in a large town and two were employed by suburban districts. Six of the interviewees were women and three were men. All names of the interviewees were changed to pseudonyms.

The teachers interviewed provided a good cross-section of middle and high school teachers; rural, suburban, and urban schools; levels of teaching experience; and types of teacher training/endorsements. All the interviewees seemed eager to share their best practices when it came to teaching Shakespeare.

Although Iowa has become a state of many cultures, many of the teachers in small, rural schools had never taught an English Language Learner—even those teachers with almost 40 years experience. According to the *Iowa Independent*:

The Annual Condition of Education Report for 2008 shows that in the 2007-2008 school year there were more than 20,000 students (in Iowa classrooms) for whom English was their second language. Three of every four English Language Learners identified their primary language as Spanish. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that 120,000 people who classified themselves as Hispanic lived in Iowa last year, a 44 percent increase from 2000. An analysis of the numbers by the *Des Moines Register* shows that the increasing number of immigrant families in Iowa is expected to reverse the declining enrollment numbers in Iowa public schools. . . . The overall percentage of minority students in Iowa is 14.4 percent, up from 3.6 percent in 2006-2007 and 7.7 percent in 1998 (par. 2).

It can be reasonably stated that although teachers in smaller, rural schools in Iowa may have not experienced any English Language Learners to date, they will more than likely teach non-native speakers in the not-so-distant future.

In addition, beginning teachers have had less experience with students from low-income families. All nine of the teachers identified their school system of low-income based on the number of students that receive free or reduced lunches. According to USDA Ueconomic Research Service, the average per-capita income for all Iowans in 2007 was \$34,916, although rural per-capita lagged at \$32,225. In 2007, it was estimated that a poverty rate of 11% existed in both rural and urban Iowa (par. 3). This data is consistent

with the findings of the interviews that many students in Iowa, regardless of whether they live in a rural or urban setting, experience poverty.

### **Teachers with Less Than Ten Years Experience**

I interviewed three teachers with less than ten years experience: Bethany, Lisa, and Julie. Bethany is one of a two-person English department in a small, rural school where a large percentage of students (42%) receive free and reduced lunches, a sign of a low-income area. According to the Northwest Area Foundation, the average percentage of students eligible in school districts for free and reduced lunches in Iowa in 2006-2007 was 32.1% (par. 4).

Bethany said she had every intention of teaching *Romeo and Juliet* to her English 9 classes in her first year of teaching, but deleted that unit because she “ran out of time.” Instead, she introduced a spelling unit to “help prepare her students for the standardized tests.” This year, however, she said she is determined to find time to teach *Romeo and Juliet* to her ninth graders. She stated she has a better grasp as a second-year teacher on time-management and administrative expectations.

Her course load is changing this year as well. This will be her first year teaching English 10. She says she looks forward to teaching a Shakespearean play, once again, if she has the time. She said she’d like to introduce sophomores to *Midsummer Night’s Dream* “if they can handle it,” but then openly wondered if, since they didn’t study *Romeo and Juliet*, they’d be able to fully comprehend the more complicated comedy.

One teaching method Bethany prefers is breaking down the phrases and having her students “translate” them into modern English. This is a method she says she can easily vary, depending on the readiness of her readers. For instance, she says she plans to break the plays

down statement-by-statement for her students with special needs, but give her talented and gifted (TAG) students much larger chunks to interpret. She also plans to encourage her more advanced students to answer rhetorical questions like “What does Shakespeare mean to you?” and to act out scenes for the rest of the class to observe and critique. “Shakespeare should be read out loud and it needs to be read slowly,” she emphasized. “And, it should always be performed as well. I plan to divide the class into groups and have them all act out the same scene, then present their interpretations to each other to compare and contrast,” she said.

When assessing her students, Bethany tends to stick to the more traditional method paper and pencil tests, which combine multiple-choice questions with essay questions. She allows her students with special needs more time to take the exam and often allows them take it with a resource room teacher at their side, providing extra help when needed. She emphasized that test scores make up less than twenty percent of the total grade, meaning that students who are not good test-takers can still succeed in her classes by doing well on take-home assignments and classroom activities, which make up the majority of the points in her units.

Lisa, who teaches in a very small, rural school like Bethany, has managed to find time to fit the writer she calls the “quintessential” author into her courses. She stated:

I am pleased that the school board requires that Shakespeare be taught in eleventh and twelfth grade English courses, including Senior English, which is a graduation requirement, and British Literature, which is an elective. The school urged me to teach *Macbeth*, which is a difficult play, primarily because the school already has classroom copies and a great deal of supplementary material on that play. I intend to

teach ninth and tenth graders one of Shakespeare's plays as well, to help prepare them for *Macbeth*. Quite frankly, I would prefer to teach another work other than *Macbeth*, but with school budgets being as they are, I chose to stick with the material I had at hand instead of requesting a different classroom set.

Even with the school board-written mandate to teach Shakespeare to all eleventh and twelfth graders, Lisa strives to make Shakespeare more than just a graduation requirement. She works to make it relevant to a broad range of students from different backgrounds. This, she says, takes time, and time is always of the essence in her classroom. "Shakespeare is the quintessential writer. He is revered. He is timeless. How can any English teacher in good conscience NOT teach the works of William Shakespeare?" she questioned.

However, she occasionally struggles to make this great writer relevant to her rural students. She said, "I work to compare Shakespeare to something they know. For instance, vampires are hot right now with high school students due to the *Twilight* series, so I try to tie these and other creatures in with the witches in *Macbeth* or the ghosts in *Hamlet*. The secret to making Shakespeare relevant to your students is knowing your students and what 'makes them tick.'"

Lisa even uses an anime version of *Macbeth* to help make it more accessible to her visual learners. She cautions, however, that, "It is important to read Shakespeare as intended, so alternate versions like Manga should only be used in supplemental roles."

She employs a type of close-reading when teaching Shakespeare through the use of post-it notes. "As my students read through his writing, I have them keep a post-it pad handy to mark any places they have questions to ask me later. After a reading session, we backtrack and discuss all those questions."

When assessing her students' knowledge of Shakespeare, Lisa relies on a variety of methods, including a large end-of-the-unit written exam. She stated:

I like giving students choices in assignments and assessments, but I also think it is nice on occasion to be able to compare students on the exact, same task. While I often give the students a choice in *which* essay question they can answer, they all must complete at least one essay on each major exam. This lets me compare and contrast the written comprehension skills of each student with each other student. I guess I am pretty traditional in that way.

Bethany and Lisa share more than a somewhat traditional method of assessing students' knowledge of Shakespeare. They are both second-year educators in Iowa high schools. Both teach a combination of required courses and electives. A common theme runs with these two teachers: they both say they love Shakespeare and are very eager to teach his works. Bethany stated: "The high school experience is completely different for students if they don't study Shakespeare." However, both are worried that because of time constraints and other requirements they may be forced to eliminate the Bard from their lesson plans.

Julie, the third teacher in the least experienced group, represents quite a different experience from the other two new teachers. She not only has been teaching for longer than the others (nine years), but she also teaches middle school in an urban district with a very diverse ethnic population. Fifty percent of her students receive free and reduced lunch and 40% have been identified as students with special needs. She stated that she always had taught *Julius Caesar* to her eighth graders, but can no longer do so because of new district regulations. "The high school didn't want middle school teachers instructing students in

certain works,” she said. “My students really liked studying *Julius Caesar*. Middle school students can certainly understand power, which is the theme of the play.”

Julie also teaches a large percentage of ELL students. Her middle school will be the “newcomer” school for all new ELL children starting with this school year. Julie also stated that 30% of her students are identified as talented and gifted. Julie teaches a much greater variety in her classroom than Bethany and Julie, as well as a younger group. She said she regrets not being allowed to teach Shakespeare to her eighth graders any more, particularly because of the Shakespeare that is taught at the high school level.

I knew they were going to see it (Shakespeare) as freshmen and I wanted to expose them to the language prior to that. I particularly found using a dual text—where one side is written in the original iambic pentameter and the other side has a modern-day translation—to work well with this age level.

I have a project-based classroom, so I was able to differentiate my instruction to appeal to all learning groups. For example, I offered a tic-tac-toe board to all students as a way to evaluate their progress. Students chose three projects to show me that they have mastered the material. The board offered projects that pulled in all different kinds of learners including visual, hands-on, etc.

Special needs students can then choose projects with which they feel comfortable and work on them with or without a collaborative teacher. Gifted students are encouraged to choose more complicated or perhaps even an extra project. With ELL students I tended to concentrate on vocabulary—not so much concepts like foreshadowing, but words like “triumvirate.”

Julie acknowledged that many teachers don't introduce their students to Shakespeare in middle school and that *Julius Caesar* is declining in popularity among secondary instructors. Neither of these facts deterred her from believing that *Julius Caesar* "worked" in her eighth grade classroom. Julie said, "If you take the plays to their smallest point, you can teach Shakespeare at the middle school level. For *Julius Caesar*, that point is power—who has it and how others can get it—and betrayal. With a dual text and a lot of time, all middle school students regardless of ability can benefit."

In conclusion, the least-experienced of the teachers all said they had a passion for introducing their students to the works of William Shakespeare, and they all faced hurdles that were somewhat beyond their control. Bethany's obstacle was the schedule and finding time to teach all that was expected of her, as well as the Bard. Lisa's obstacle was resources. She was required to teach Shakespeare to her upperclassmen, but felt somewhat uncomfortable with the play they preferred: *Macbeth*. Julie's obstacle was administrative: she was told to no longer teach *Julius Caesar* and "leave Shakespeare to the high school teachers."

### **Teachers with Ten-Nineteen Years of Experience**

Two female and one male teacher were interviewed that fit into the ten-nineteen years of experience sub-group. Of these three, two taught at small, rural schools and one taught in a large, suburban district. Lucy represents the mid-level group with twelve years of teaching experience, most of it in a rural Iowa school district. She does not currently teach William Shakespeare to her required classes because of the district's emphasis on writing. Although she teaches all the eleventh graders for the entire school year, she focuses on the teaching of



composition as required by her district, which leaves little time for extensive study of literature. She did note, however, that the Bard is taught in other classes in her high school.

“*Romeo and Juliet* is taught to ninth graders and *Julius Caesar* is taught to tenth graders. Either *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* is taught to twelfth graders who take senior English. I do have experience teaching the classics. My first seven years teaching were spent at a very small, very rural district in northern Iowa, and I taught *Macbeth* to my senior English students. I would very much like to teach this play again if the curriculum or my assignment changes. *Macbeth* was so much fun for me to teach and I think the kids liked it, too. The unit was very active, with students pretending to be witches one day and shouting “out damn spot” the next. I loved it.

Tammy, the second teacher in this category, has similar years of experience (fourteen) to Lucy, but works in a large suburban high school. She says she doesn’t have a set schedule of which plays she teaches at which level. Much like Lisa, she likes to become acquainted with her students before she starts the Shakespeare unit. She uses her knowledge of them to help choose the plays they will read. She said,

I like my students to “buy in” to what I am teaching. Usually I get to know them for a few weeks and then give them a choice of two or three plays I think they’d enjoy. I then try to link the plays with something more modern to which they can relate.

Often, I will teach a modern novel alongside the Shakespearean play. For instance, I taught Jane Smiley’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *1,000 Acres* in conjunction with *King Lear* to an advanced literature class. I raised the question to my students: What did King Lear do to those two daughters to make them behave so

horribly? Reading *1,000 Acres* certainly added a new, modern, and extremely relevant dimension to this discussion.

Prior to her last two years teaching at a suburban school, Tammy taught at a small rural district, where she taught *Romeo and Juliet* to her English 9 classes every single year. “Isn’t that a law?” she joked.

At her current school, she also incorporates William Shakespeare’s works into classes that are not traditional English literature or survey courses. For instance, she teaches one of the comedies (generally *Much Ado About Nothing* or *Midsummer Night’s Dream*) to her drama class, which is an elective for students in grades ten-twelve. “This class is kind of a ‘dumping ground’ for students who need an English credit, but are not college bound,” she explained. “Still, they need to be exposed to Shakespeare just as much as my senior English students.” Tammy echoed the work of Maurice Gilmour when she said, “It is good for kids to tackle him (Shakespeare). If they know they can read and understand Shakespeare, they know they can do anything I ask of them.” Tammy called the works of William Shakespeare “timeless, amazing, funny, and very, very relevant.”

For many of her students with special needs, Tammy has found success “feeding them the lines” as they read the play aloud, then having them repeat what she said. She says this method also works with behaviorial disorder students, although in this circumstance she generally has them paired with either an associate or a peer.

She assigns advanced students to take the play home, read it, and then come back to the class ready to discuss. She said, “Gifted students are often really good at regurgitating information and some of them pretend to work on their own but in reality are just coasting.

So, I employ a lot of group work and performance with these students in order to challenge them.”

Tammy teaches a wide variety of students, including English Language Learners, many of them Spanish speaking. She emphasized the role of selection when introducing Shakespeare to English Language Learners. “It is important a teacher makes sure these students are given the right lines and the right scenes to read and perform,” she said. Tammy does extensive cutting of Shakespeare’s plays when working with all levels of students, especially English Language Learners and students with special needs.

To appeal to her visual and hands-on learners, she encourages her students to act out scenes, sometimes with costuming, and produce “tableaus.” A tableau is when the teacher gives the students a scene and asks them to stage the scene, using all characters, without movement. “It is like a moment in time from the show; like a ‘diorama in a shoebox,’” she said. Then she often compares their interpretation of the scene with video clips and still photos from professional productions. “I have found that even my ‘screw offs’ have fun reading Shakespeare. They certainly aren’t afraid to get up and do the scene. Many of these students particularly enjoy it when we reenact the sword fight from *Hamlet* using ‘air broad swords.’” She encourages costuming for some of the scene presentations to bring in yet another aspect of the theatre.

Tammy is somewhat unique in that she teaches several dual-credit or “early bird” courses in conjunction with a nearby community college. These classes give students high school and college credit at the same time.

The third teacher in this category, Grant, has thirty years of experience, but only ten of it is in the area of English, placing him in the mid-level category of this survey. He teaches

in a rural school with a low socio-economic level and few, if any, English Language Learners. He currently teaches middle and high school students and actively introduces his seventh grade students to *As You Like It*. “I had misgivings about teaching Shakespeare to seventh graders, but I’m sure glad I did it now,” he said. “I introduce them to the plot in seventh grade. We watch the BBC version. Kids need an introduction to Shakespeare and his style of writing, and this way has been effective for me,” Grant said.

When asked about the relevancy of Shakespeare, Grant agreed with Tammy, “What was written so long ago still pertains today and it is funny. Funny doesn’t go out of style.”

Grant asks all his students to act out the scenes, but says this is particularly effective with his students with special needs. He also likes to pair his gifted students who “understand the best” with kids who struggle with comprehension. He says that visual learners also particularly benefit from the plot mapping strategy: “It always amazes me how easily they can grasp the plot when we map it.” In regards to the current emphasis on standardized testing, he said one concession he made was to put the Shakespeare unit in after the test was taken. This way, he could concentrate on the skills that were more directly related to the ITBS and then “tackle” classic literature later in the year.

Grant said, “I tend to use less-structured methods of assessment with this unit than the traditional pencil and paper test. For example, the final assessment may be a scene with student actors and student directors. Not only does the assessment ‘fit’ the unit, it is always good to get kids up and moving during those spring months.”

Echoing the words of their younger colleagues, the three teachers with mid-level experience said they loved the work of William Shakespeare and felt that teaching it to their students was of the utmost importance. They, however, (with the exception of Lucy, who

taught primarily writing classes), seemed to have more success working it into their daily lesson plans. Perhaps because of their experience, these teachers had a wide variety of teaching methods in their educational toolboxes and weren't afraid to vary methods from year-to-year, class-to-class, or even student-to-student to aid in comprehension of difficult material. These teachers all emphasized flexibility and getting to know their students as keys to making Shakespeare accessible, interesting, and relevant in their classes.

### **Teachers with Over Twenty Years of Experience**

The advanced group of teachers has one hundred years of experience among them teaching English in Iowa secondary schools. Of the three interviewed, two were women and one was a man. One was recently retired, one was semi-retired, and one was still employed full time. Two were teaching in rural districts and one was employed by a school district in a large town. The more experienced ones indicated they had been using differentiated instruction before it became an educational buzzword.

The least experienced of this group, Janice, recently retired after teaching 28 1/2 years in small, rural school systems, the last two decades at the junior high level. She said she incorporated Shakespeare into other junior high units (like film, where she would show *Hamlet*) or into a seminar setting, but didn't offer it as a free-standing unit. She said, "In junior high, I just want them to get comfortable with Shakespeare, not overwhelm them."

In her earlier years of teaching, she followed what appears to be the norm and taught *Romeo and Juliet* to ninth graders and *Julius Caesar* to tenth graders. She then taught *Hamlet* and sometimes *Macbeth* to juniors and seniors.

While Grant chose to teach his students Shakespeare after the standardized tests were given, Janice found that even with this concession, it was difficult to fit Shakespeare into her lesson plans.

The longer I taught, the less Shakespeare I had time for. I felt I was losing ground with my students when we started teaching with more of an emphasis on standardized testing and grammar workbooks. I had to go before the school board three times to explain the rationale and terminology behind the writer's workshop. When all I could see was more hoops I would have to jump through to teach the literature I loved, I knew it was time to retire.

I always felt you should teach what you really love. I fell in love with the works of William Shakespeare while still in college. The last class I took before graduating college was Understanding Shakespeare, and I left that course wanting to share what I loved about English with my students. I did this for decades, but as I saw the school system becoming more and more a business, I felt this wasn't what I signed up for and retired. When you teach to the test, something's got to go, and for me that was Shakespeare.

For many years, Janice was the sole English teacher in grades 7-12, all of which were located in the same building in the same small town. This gave her a unique opportunity to structure the Shakespeare curriculum in her school with more instructional consistency than teachers who work in school systems with many English teachers and many school campuses. She said, "I occasionally taught *Hamlet* to junior high students. He is sort of a teenager, after all. Naturally, I would avoid the incest question. Then I would reintroduce it

to juniors or seniors in high school and we'd discuss how they viewed it differently with age."

Janice agreed with Tammy about methods for teaching students with special needs, saying, "I picked their parts very carefully when I asked them to read out loud with the rest of the class. I often made them the soldier, for instance, so they could participate, but not experience the stress of reading a much larger role in front of their classmates. Special needs students particularly benefited from watching videos of the productions."

She said she ran a project-based classroom, which benefited her visual and hands-on learners and that she encouraged her TAG students to complete extra projects. "I based my teaching on how I raised my kids: introduce them to what you love and the rest will follow," she concluded.

The second teacher in the most experienced category is Karla, who is still teaching, but on the edge of retirement and has 33 years in the classroom. Perhaps due to her seniority, she teaches mostly electives to college-bound students. She teaches *Julius Caesar* to tenth graders, *Macbeth* to eleventh graders, *Midsummer Night's Dream* in English Literature, and *Hamlet* in world literature. Although she doesn't teach ninth grade, she says that *Romeo and Juliet* is taught in English 9 in her high school, which is located in a large town. Karla stated, "I teach Shakespeare because he is universal; you find things about yourself and human nature when you read him. Reading Shakespeare allows students to join the body of educated people."

She said she has a significant number of Spanish-speaking students in her lower-level, required classes (last semester she had four English Language Learners), enough to justify having Spanish copies of all the plays. She stated, however, she has never had an

English Language Learners in her college prep courses. Thirty-three percent of her students receive free and reduced lunches, slightly above the state average. “Any given required class that I teach has one to five students with special needs,” she stated.

Karla offers a wide variety of texts for her students, in addition to the Spanish ones. Although she prefers they read the original text, she also owns the plays on tape and middle school versions, which concentrate heavily on the storyline and omit many of the nuances. She uses a very project-based classroom and very often gives open-book quizzes for difficult readings such as Shakespeare. She explained, “I have found that the accommodations I have been making for years for my special needs students often work very well with English Language Learners as well.” For her gifted students, she joins her colleagues in asking them to do extra projects. She also encourages them to make comparisons with other plays and their own lives, as well as plot predictions.

Karla stressed the universality of Shakespeare and offered many teaching techniques that emphasize this. She said, “After we read the part in *Hamlet* where Polonius offers parental advice, I often ask the students to write advice to their own future children. This clearly shows that parenting has not changed all that much in these many hundreds of years.”

Although continuing to teach Shakespeare, she admitted that her principal thinks that her English department tends to overemphasize Shakespeare and that it is too difficult for many of their students. She said, “I tell the principal that all my students like it and that my system of reading the work, discussing the work, acting out the work, and then assessing with an open-book test makes even the most difficult reading accessible to all students.”

By focusing on the ethical questions of the work, often in the form of a cumulative essay assignment, Karla strives to make the plays relevant. For instance, after reading



*Macbeth* she asks her upper level students to discuss in writing “who is responsible for the actions of Macbeth—his wife? the witches? himself?”

The final teacher in the most experienced category, Kevin, is also on the verge of retirement, teaching only part-time in a small rural school. He has 39 years of experience and is, much like Maurice Gilmour, a big fan of Shakespearean language. The only classes he is currently teaching are upper-level, dual-credit courses in conjunction with a nearby community college, much like those taught by Tammy. In the past, however, he has taught every class currently offered at his school. Because his classes are all college classes, he says he does not have any students with special needs or English Language Learners. “Students have to take a reading test to take these classes. So far no special needs or English Language Learners have done so,” he said. “The only English Language Learners I have ever taught are foreign exchange students, and they generally have the best English of anyone in the class!”

In Introduction to Literature, he teaches a *Macbeth* unit he describes as “intense.” He also requires all students to read another Shakespearean play of their choice from an outside reading list. The concept of reintroducing Shakespeare to older students in a slightly different way as mentioned by Janice is one he endorses as well. He explained, “We give our younger students a good foundation in Shakespeare at this school. We teach *Romeo and Juliet* to ninth graders, and then I often reintroduce it in college courses in conjunction with the movie *Shakespeare in Love*,” he said.

Also like Janice and Grant, Kevin often shows film versions of the plays, particularly for his auditory learners. He cited the Lawrence Fishburne version of *Othello* and the Mel Gibson version of *Hamlet* as two films the students seemed to really enjoy. “Shakespeare’s

themes are universal and he does a great job showing what can be done with language,” Kevin said of William Shakespeare. “Reading Shakespeare helps students become good readers, even in a non-poetic way. They get a good feeling for the power of language when they read his works.” Most importantly, he said with a smile, he teaches Shakespeare because “I like it!”

For gifted students, Kevin likes to use contests, especially ones that deal with quotations or paraphrasing. He also likes to have all his students perform monologues or duets. “I use any method I can to make them ‘speak up’ and play with the language. Reading Shakespeare is an intense part of any student’s introduction to literature. There is great value in working with language and seeing how language can work.”

One of Kevin’s favorite forms of assessment is the in-class paper, where students are given a choice of essay questions the night before and then are to come to class prepared to write a well-thought out, college-level answer to the question they choose. For the *Macbeth* unit, students write two of these—one at the beginning of the study and one near the end. In addition to written assessments, he has students present a Shakespearean monologue and take part in a Shakespearean duet. These must be selected from a play other than *Macbeth*, *Othello*, or *Hamlet*—the three plays studied as a class. Kevin said, “This exposes the entire class to a wide variety of Shakespeare’s works and also encourages students to really ‘get to know’ a play on their own.” Kevin also gives a more traditional end-of-unit test, as well as an oral exam over Shakespearean quotations and *Macbeth*.

Two of the most experienced of teachers (Kevin and Janice) instruct mainly upper-level, advanced courses at the high school level. Both include Shakespeare liberally and with enthusiasm in their curriculum. The third teacher in the most experienced category is retired,

but reflected with nostalgia on her days introducing young students to the Bard. All three teachers employed project-based classrooms and used many different alternate forms of assessment.

These interviews indicated that William Shakespeare is “alive and well” in Iowa schools. Eight of the nine teachers said that they did indeed teach the works of Shakespeare in their classrooms. The ninth teacher expressed regret that she did not teach Shakespeare, but pointed out her district had a writing emphasis and she taught only required courses. She said that she hoped someday to teach an elective so she could teach literature, including the plays of William Shakespeare. One teacher was retired but stated she taught the works of Shakespeare up until her last day in the classroom, and one middle school teacher regretted she would not be able to teach Shakespeare in the current school year because of new district guidelines.

## Chapter Four: Analysis

After examining current research on the relevancy and appropriateness of teaching Shakespeare to secondary students and interviewing a cross-section of Iowa secondary teachers (Appendix A and B) in regard to their teaching of Shakespeare, the question arises: “Do the works of William Shakespeare still hold a prominent and revered place in Iowa secondary classrooms, or are Iowa teachers disregarding the experts and choosing not to teach Shakespeare and concentrate on other, more ‘testable’ topics?”

Three universal conclusions emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Nine out of nine teachers interviewed say they “love” William Shakespeare and are eager to include his works in their classrooms. Second, they feel that Shakespeare needs to be taught to secondary students. While none of the interviewees specifically referred to NCTE/IRA standards, all believed in teaching texts across the periods (Standard 2), used a variety of versions, including print and film (Standard 1), and utilized a variety of instructional strategies (Standards 3). Third, the most common plays taught to Iowa secondary students are *Romeo and Juliet* (mostly to ninth graders), *Julius Caesar* (mostly to tenth graders), and then either *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or a comedy to older students.

Interestingly, the teachers with the least experience and the closest proximity to college methods course, used the least variety of texts. Although Lisa did offer a Manga version to her students, she emphasized that the original text would always be the primary one used in her classroom. Bethany did not offer alternative versions of the text to her students, but chose to examine smaller “chunks” or take more time with the original iambic pentameter in order to ensure comprehension. Julie gave her middle school students a dual

text, which had the original Elizabethan language on one side and a modern translation on the other. She explained, “This is so they aren’t completely lost.”

One major concern of the younger teachers interviewed was time to fit all that is required and expected into their lessons, while still finding time to teach the classics. Although they didn’t necessarily face opposition to teaching the works of William Shakespeare, they certainly felt pressure to reach many other classroom goals as well, including preparing their students for standardized tests. Because of their lack of experience, these teachers were less able to combat these pressures in regard to keeping Shakespeare in their lesson plans.

Bethany and Lisa used less variety in their methods than teachers with more experience. In their high school classrooms, the emphasis was on close reading and translation. Lisa went so far as to give her students post-it notes, so they could jot down any questions they had while reading the play as a class and save the questions for discussion time later. Julie, the middle school teacher with less than ten years experience, chose to center her lessons on *Julius Caesar* on theme (power) and vocabulary. Julie said, “My English Language Learners especially are not much into concepts like foreshadowing, but enjoy learning words like *triumverate*.” It is interesting to note that Julie taught a play that is declining in popularity among secondary teachers. When asked about this, she adamantly supported her decision to teach this to eighth graders, stating, “*Julius Caesar* is about power, and if there is anything a junior high kid understands, it’s power!”

In the area of assessment, Bethany and Lisa—who were both second year teachers in small, rural, relatively homogenous school systems - relied on more traditional class discussion and end-of-unit tests, while Julie—who had almost a decade of experience and

dealt with a wide-variety of students - used a “tic-tac-toe” board of projects designed to appeal to different types of learners. For example, to “pull in” her visual or hands-on learners, she offered them a chance to make a 3-D model of a set for their final assessment. She said, “If you take Shakespeare’s plays to the smallest point, you can definitely teach them at the middle school level.”

The teachers in the mid-range group of experience used a much larger variety of texts and assessments than their younger counterparts, particularly Bethany and Lisa. Tammy, the mid-range teacher who taught at a suburban high school with a diverse population, even created her own texts, using extensive cutting to appeal to all her students and assigning parts very carefully so that English Language Learners or students with special needs weren’t intimidated with large, complicated roles. Grant relied on the film version of *As You Like It* for his middle school Shakespeare unit, shying away from all written text. “I wanted to expose them to Shakespeare, not frighten them,” he said with a smile.

Tammy and Grant both emphasized getting students “up and moving” in their classrooms, particularly during the Shakespeare units. Tammy noted that her students particularly enjoyed the mock battles she staged using “air broad swords” and when she allowed them to use costumes when producing a scene. Grant said that the best instructional strategy he had found involved writing the main characters on the middle of the board and having students draw arrows to show their various relationships.

The teachers in the mid-level experience range all commented that their classrooms were sometimes viewed as chaotic or “crazy” by outsiders, but that Shakespeare was meant to be performed and therefore they were determined to have students experience his works in this way. Grant said that with his middle school students, he particularly appreciated having

an active, drama unit in the spring so they could get up and work off some of the “spring fever energy” inherent in that time of year.

The teachers with the most experience did not have a uniform vision in regard to what text(s) to use when teaching the works of William Shakespeare. Kevin taught Shakespeare to his dual-credit classes using only the original text. He emphasized that these classes were college classes and he felt strongly that the emphasis should be on Shakespeare’s language at the college level. He felt that truncated or other non-traditional versions of Shakespeare’s plays did not show the beauty of the language as the original did. Karla preferred varying the texts she used, assigning her students texts ranging from the original to a version on tape to a middle school, truncated version, depending on their educational needs and individual learning styles. Janice echoed Grant, another middle school teacher, by emphasizing video versions of the play, even teaching Shakespeare as part of her film unit and not as a free-standing unit.

Although Kevin only offered one choice of text during his Shakespearean units, he did offer many forms of assessment, as did the other two teachers in the most experienced range. Karla assigned her students open-book tests and also assessed their knowledge during class discussion and while acting monologues and scenes. Janice also chose to check for understanding by having her students select a scene and then act it out for the rest of the middle school class.

Middle school teachers, in general, had more trouble including Shakespeare in their curriculum than their high school counterparts. Julie was directly told at the beginning of this school year not to include Shakespeare in her junior high curriculum. Janice chose to retire after more and more board directives on curricular choices forced her to eliminate

Shakespeare from her lesson plans. Grant still teaches Shakespeare to his seventh grade students, but waits until spring so he can concentrate on skills thought to relate more directly to standardized tests.

It is interesting to note a worldwide trend regarding the teaching of Shakespeare to younger secondary students. Places as diverse as New Zealand (Jamieson, par. 1) and Texas (Bloomington, par. 1) have deemed Shakespeare “too difficult” for most students and eliminated or greatly reduced the teaching of his works. It could be concluded by some that middle school teachers are seen as having more important topics to teach than Shakespeare or, perhaps, that high school teachers and students are better equipped to tackle the Bard than their middle school counterparts. However, the evidence and research is contrary to this assumption. In fact, much of the original research in England concluded that the instruction of Shakespeare should start in elementary school, years before the ages of the students studied and discussed in this paper (Gibson, Sedwick).

The issue of appropriateness was often mentioned by middle school and even ninth and tenth grade teachers. A ninth grade English teacher commented that she didn’t point out the sexual references in *Romeo and Juliet* to her students, and a teacher of sophomores openly wondered if her students could “handle” *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*.

Many teachers found it beneficial to introduce a play or concept to younger students and then reintroduce it in a more mature manner to their older students. Two examples would be Janice, who introduced *Hamlet* as a teenaged protagonist to junior high students and then retaught the play to juniors, bringing in the more mature themes like incest, and Kevin, who built on his students’ ninth grade experience reading *Romeo and Juliet* by showing them the film *Shakespeare in Love* as juniors and seniors. Of course, consistency



such as this requires either very small English departments (at the time Julie was the only 7-12 English teacher in her small, rural school) or an emphasis on staff communication.

The most experienced group of teachers interviewed (Kevin, Janice, and Karla) kept repeating that reading Shakespeare allows students to enter the body of educated people. All three said that they firmly believed in and were committed to the traditional liberal arts education. Perhaps this commitment stems from their undergraduate education, which would have been attained in the 1960s and 1970s. As noted in the research of Valerie Halstead, college education in those decades was primarily idealistic/individualistic (64), while teacher education of more recent decades was more firmly rooted in the business ethic and more firmly controlled by the government (68).

(In the 1970s,) universities were autonomous: they were communities of scholars encouraging the ten percent of the population who attended them to learn for the joy of learning. University education, whilst providing some professional courses (law, medicine, engineering, etc.), was ultimately about developing the minds of the students (qtd. in Halstead 64). . . In the 1990's the notion of a university as a "community of scholars" was disappearing. Teacher education . . . was now *Teacher Training* and its students *trainees*. Unlike other university students their courses were rigidly controlled. Emphasis was laid on the practicalities of teaching (70).

The most experienced teachers would have most likely matriculated in a "school of scholars" environment where learning for learning's sake was emphasized and the younger teachers would have most likely studied in a more controlled environment with an emphasis on standards and competencies.

Kevin, the teacher with the most experience of those interviewed, was perhaps the teacher most dedicated to the “learning for learning’s sake” school of thought. In his dual-credit literature classes, he requires students to pass a large “cultural literacy” test at the end of each semester. This test not only concerned material studied during the course of the semester, but also famous authors and quotes, characters, themes, and plots from canonical literature. Kevin said:

The primary function of the cultural literacy tests was to add to their literature background and force them to memorize some of the information necessary to be an educated person. Literature is full of allusions to other literature, and an educated reader must be able to understand these allusions to fully enjoy the work.

Kevin handed out the two-hundred point cultural literacy test at the beginning of the semester and expected students to locate the answers, memorize them, and then repeat them on the exam the last day of the same semester.

The group of most experienced teachers had more in common than just an appreciation for a traditional liberal arts education and a smaller number of English Language Learners and students with special needs. They also all three tended to run project-based classrooms of differentiated learning, even before the research of Carol Ann Tomlinson made the term a buzzword in education. It can be concluded that their many years of teaching experience led them to choose the best type of instruction and assessment for their students—that of offering different means of reaching and evaluating the same learning, taking into account learning styles, background, and student preferences.

Tomlinson may have coined the term “differentiated learning,” but good teachers have been utilizing projects and tic-tac-toe boards and visual learning for decades before her

works were published. Once again we are reminded of the work of DeCourcy, Fairchild, and Follet in the book *Teaching Romeo and Juliet*, “Teachers are probably already employing strategies that fit perfectly within the tall order that differentiation seems to be” (ix).

Although the most experienced teachers utilized many teaching methods when trying to reach their students, it is the teachers with 10-15 years of experience that used the most variety when teaching Shakespeare to secondary students. This group relied on more student input when choosing texts and activities and, as shown by Tammy, liked to know their students’ interests better before diving into a Shakespearean play. Instead of teaching the same tragedy every fall, they were more likely to give their students a choice of Shakespearean play.

This group also tended to put more of an emphasis on relevancy, tying their play selections in with current events or the students’ own lives. This is an interesting contrast to the most experienced group, who unanimously said that one of the main reasons to study the classics is to become one of the educated and to “learn to think.” The middle group of teachers implied that joining the body of learned folk isn’t enough, and Shakespeare’s plays must be made relevant to today’s worlds. The mid-level teachers tended not to emphasize rote memorization, as much as project-based learning and open-book exams.

While the younger group of teachers had a desire to teach Shakespeare to their students, they lacked the toolbox of teaching methods from which to choose that the older teachers possessed. While close reading and breaking down the texts may be valid ways of teaching, they may not hold the interest of students who are visual or hands-on learners or maybe don’t speak English as their native language. Of course, variety of teaching methods comes from more experience and more research—and this naturally comes from more years

in the classroom. A first- or second-year teacher can easily become overwhelmed with the demands of a classroom and realize in the spring that he/she will have to eliminate some units. Unfortunately, it seems that oftentimes the units deleted from the curriculum are those about William Shakespeare.

The middle group of teachers occupies the middle ground in more ways than just experience. They are the bridge between the younger teachers—who want to teach Shakespeare to all their students, but despair that either time or mandatory curriculum will not allow them—and the older teachers, who teach elective courses with smaller variety of students than found in a typical classroom.

Perhaps it is the teachers with enough experience to be confident in the classroom, but not so much seniority that they only teach upper-level students, who can demonstrate the best ways to approach the works of William Shakespeare.

Most educators agree that Shakespeare belongs in the classroom, and all students should have access to his work. By getting to know their students and paying attention to their learning styles, teachers can easily use differentiated instruction when teaching the works of William Shakespeare. This type of instruction not only makes Shakespeare's plays more relevant to students, but also helps them take the information they learn during study and apply it to other areas as well.

Teachers should use every method at their disposal—especially other teachers who have “seen it all”—to help them plan and execute their instruction of this seminal author. If they do this, they can easily justify teaching the Bard to superiors and make him interesting and timely to students.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

In this paper, I examined the reasons why the works of William Shakespeare are still relevant in the modern Iowa secondary English classroom. I reviewed the works of researchers here in the United States and in Europe, and presented many different methods for integrating Shakespeare's plays (and, by extension, other classics as well) with modern education theories, such as those promoted by Carol Ann Tomlinson. From the review of literature, I identified twelve reasons why Shakespeare should still be taught in secondary classrooms. Foremost among these reasons is that the works of William Shakespeare are still relevant to today's students, due to their universal theme and spectacular use of language.

I then looked at nine typical 7-12 Iowa English teachers to see how they approached the Bard in their classroom. These teachers were divided into three groups of three: teachers with less than ten years experience; teachers with 10-15 years experience; and teachers with more than twenty years in the classroom. The teachers were then further grouped into middle school teachers and high school teachers, as well as urban, suburban, and rural teachers. The result was a portrait of similarities and differences in Shakespeare instruction among the subgroups, including a comparison of the reality of Iowa classrooms with the prevalent research and theories on the teaching of Shakespeare in the teachers' classrooms.

I concluded that Shakespeare is "alive and well" in Iowa's secondary English classrooms and that Iowa teachers agree with and embrace the current theory that Shakespeare should be taught to all students, regardless of background. However, I found that the least experienced of the teachers often struggled with time management in their classrooms. With the demands of a new career and many educational directives coming from

the administration and school boards, younger teachers were concerned they would not be able to find time to fit the “quintessential” writer into their curriculum.

Middle school teachers also struggled to find time and justification for teaching William Shakespeare. Unlike their high school counterparts, these teachers had more direct, outside pressure in regards to what was taught in their classrooms. Some were simply told not to teach Shakespeare and to omit it from their curriculum. Others were forced to justify all they were teaching in their classrooms repeatedly to the school board. Still others acknowledged that the pressures of high-stakes testing caused them to reconsider how much Shakespeare to teach and when to place it on the school calendar.

The most experienced high school teachers of the group tended to teach more elective and dual-credit courses. Because of this, they also tended to have fewer (if any) English Language Learners and students with special needs in their classes. This group of teacher embraced the teaching of William Shakespeare, primarily because they saw him as an important (perhaps the most important) English writer and felt reading his works made students more well-rounded and admitted them into the body of educated people. The most experienced teachers all ran project-based classrooms when teaching William Shakespeare, as suggested by researchers in the United States and abroad.

The teachers with between ten and fifteen years of classroom experience were the most valuable resource in these interviews. They taught a large variety of students and also employed many different teaching methods they were eager to share. Some had faced opposition to their curriculum choices and had learned how to justify their curricular choices. They had enough experience with different types of students with different types of learning

styles to have a plethora of teaching methods. They knew that not all teaching methods work with all students and that student “buy-in” is an important part of any classroom unit.

The teachers with the mid-level of experience said they used a great deal of patience and flexibility in preparing their Shakespeare units. Some waited several weeks before choosing what play they were teaching that school year in order to select the best play for that particular group of students. They were also willing to manage the somewhat chaotic classroom that differentiated instruction can bring with it, experimenting with different texts, costuming, and even native music/dance in order to reach their students. They were willing to vary the text—offering everything from abridged texts to manga texts to bilingual texts.

The teachers with between ten and fifteen years experience seemed to have the best grasp on how Shakespeare should be taught in 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade Iowa classrooms: they used a wide variety of teaching methods to introduce their diverse students to the plot, character, and language of William Shakespeare. Unlike the younger teachers, who struggled somewhat with time management and variety of teaching methods and the older teachers, who did not have the diversity in their classroom the younger ones did—the teachers in the middle had both diverse classrooms and diverse teaching methods.

Since this was a qualitative study, it had some limitations. Only nine interviews were conducted, so broad conclusions cannot be made. In a qualitative study, the researcher’s interpretation of the data is key and personal biases must always be taken into consideration with such research. In this case, the interviewer was a former secondary English teacher who always included Shakespeare in her curriculum and felt concerned about the current emphasis on standardized testing. However, the objective questions kept the researcher’s bias from surfacing during the interview and analysis.

Future study could take a broader approach, perhaps including all school districts in the state of Iowa. What should be done to ensure that even the least experienced teachers with the most demanding students find time and feel confident in including the works of William Shakespeare in their lesson plans? First, teacher training may need to be evaluated. Perhaps there is a middle ground between “let’s just learn for the joy of learning” of the 1960s and 1970s and “schools need to be more like businesses and justify everything” of the 1990s and beyond. Yes, it may be difficult to directly tie the evaluation of Malvolio’s speech to a twenty-first century career, but with a little digging—as shown in Chapter Two—it is clear the skills obtained while studying the classics benefit the learner in a myriad of ways. If the pressure eases from federal, state, and local governments regarding accountability and standardized testing, perhaps a return to the teaching of the classics in ALL secondary English classes will follow.

Iowa, like most states, is already using a mentoring program for first- and second-year teachers. However, this program does not necessarily pair up experienced teachers with newcomers in the same subject area. For example, Bethany’s mentor is a middle school social studies teacher. Perhaps Bethany, who wanted to teach *Romeo and Juliet* to her freshmen, but became overwhelmed and ran out of time in her first year teaching, would have been better served with a mentor like Tammy, who had been teaching Shakespearean plays to many different age and ability level students for over a decade and was eager to share her experiences.

The diversity of Iowa students is rapidly changing and even the most experienced of teachers may need to work with non-native speakers struggling to read *Hamlet* before they retire. Perhaps administrators should use in-service time to illustrate methods and pedagogy



regarding the teaching of ELL students, even if their school currently has no such students. The day a non-native student enters a Shakespeare class and a teacher is forced to come up with creative ways to teach *Macbeth* is too late to starting devising alternative instructional strategies.

Love for and appreciation of Shakespeare is very much present in Iowa's secondary classrooms. What is needed now is additional training in how to teach the Bard to all students—and how to justify this instruction to critics. Teacher training programs, federal, state, and local legislators, and school administrators need to “step it up” in this area. The research is clear; new teachers need the training and backing to make the works of William Shakespeare available to all students in Iowa's 7-12 classrooms.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Interview Questions on Teaching Shakespeare at the Secondary Level**

1. Do you typically teach Shakespeare in your English classes? If yes, what Shakespearean works do you teach and at what grade level?
2. If you do currently teach the works of William Shakespeare, why do you include Shakespeare in the curriculum? If you don't teach Shakespeare, why not?
3. In what specific ways do you make Shakespeare accessible for different types of students?
  - a. Student with special needs
  - b. Students who are English Language Learners
  - c. Students who are Talented and Gifted
  - d. Students who are visual and hands-on learners
4. Please describe a lesson/activity that works particularly well for you in your Shakespeare classes. Why do you think this is so successful?
5. Has the No Child Left Behind legislation and its emphasis on standardized testing changed the way you teach Shakespeare in the secondary classroom? If so, in what ways have you changed your teaching strategies in regards to the works of William Shakespeare?
6. Have you ever experienced any kind of pressure from administrators, parents, and/or other teachers in regards to the curriculum you choose to teach in your English classroom, particularly the works of William Shakespeare? If so, did any of this pressure result from the current emphasis on standardized testing?

7. What else would you like to add about the teaching of Shakespeare at the secondary level?



**APPENDIX B**  
**Pre-Interview Questions on Teaching Shakespeare at the Secondary Level**

1. What is your current licensure and endorsement(s)?
2. What classes and/or grade levels are you currently teaching?
3. What classes and/or grade levels have you taught in the past?
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
5. What the average size of a typical graduating class?
6. How is your English curriculum structured for graduation requirements, required courses, and mandated curriculum?
7. Describe a typical class you teach, including average size and types of students, including ELL, TAG, students with special needs, and basic socio-economic background, and any particular special circumstances of which you'd like the researcher to be aware.